

# Where is the light? (Isaiah 60:1-6)

**When hope is dim, we need the assurance that God is with us.**

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It's winter in Alaska, where I live, and right now it feels like darkness covers the earth. We'll have less than 5 hours of daylight on the Feast of Epiphany, the celebration of light. The light in Alaska this time of year is dull and wan as the sun traces a shallow arc across the sky. The nights are long, and the temperatures stay far below freezing. What does it mean to hear a prophecy about light when you live in deep darkness?

Imagine yourself as one who recently returned from the Babylonian exile, those to whom Isaiah 60's prophecy is addressed. To quote the prophet-singer John Denver, you are coming home to a place you've never been before. Most of those returning to Judah from exile have never lived in the land of their ancestors. Jerusalem is in ruins, the economic situation dire. Conflicts arise as the returnees drifted in; the current occupants of the city are not excited to welcome them back. The people of God find themselves in a place of shadow and struggle, even though they are back where they should feel at home.

The weary returnees need a vision like this as they begin the work of rebuilding the city, their temple, and their lives. They need hope as they process the trauma—generational trauma—of living through war, forced captivity, and loss of culture.

Enter Isaiah with this beautiful vision of light, hope, and prosperity. God's glory will appear over them, the prophet says, which in Old Testament parlance means the very presence of God. God will shine on you! Nations will come to you! They will drop wealth at your doorstep! This is all very good news to the weary returnees. This is exactly what they need.

Yet it's not borne out in history, at least not exactly. The people do rebuild the city and the temple, but nations and kings don't appear out of nowhere to drop off a glut of gold to finance the job or a caravan of camels to facilitate it. Instead, rebuilding is slow and tedious, and it happens despite enemies' efforts to stall the temple restoration (Ezra 4). Yet God is still with them; God is still faithful.

When hope is dim, it can be hard to see the light of Christ and feel the presence of God. We, too, in our places of despair, need the assurance that God is with us, and that God will provide, even if it's not in the way that we expect.

I'm not trusting that God will send literal gold or camels, but I do trust that God sends other people into our lives and that many of them are bearers of light. When I have been in a place of night shadows, other people have shown me the light of Christ. Their names are Lois, Becky, Angela, and so many more. You have your own names to add.

Isaiah's prophesy wasn't historically accurate, but maybe the answer came another way. Jesus proclaims that he is the light of the world (John 8:12) and brings that very presence of God to shine on Jews and Gentiles alike. The glory of the Lord has been revealed in Christ. The Feast of Epiphany reminds us that this light is still there, hidden and revealed all over this world, even when we cannot perceive it.